



*Office of the First Lady  
Mikey L. Hoeven*

## **Combating Underage Drinking: A Shared Responsibility** **By First Lady Mikey L. Hoeven**

As a parent, the health and well being of my children is very important to me. As most parents throughout our state, I strive each day to provide them with the values they need to make healthy choices throughout their lives.

But sometimes that goal becomes difficult with the serious issues facing our children today. One issue that is particularly troubling because of its growing occurrence and lack of attention is underage alcohol use.

According to the 2003 North Dakota Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 12 percent of seventh grade students drank alcohol one or more times in the past 30 days. Another statistic indicated that of those students, almost 5 percent participated in binge drinking (5+ drinks in a row in the past 30 days).

At the other end of the continuum, when twelfth grade students were surveyed, the results indicated that 72 percent drank alcohol one or more times in the past 30 days and 56 percent participated in binge drinking.

These numbers clearly reveal that our children are starting to experiment with alcohol at very early ages. If we can delay that first drink for a few years, we can greatly reduce the risk of creating yet another person with life-long alcohol problems. Today's middle school students may become tomorrow's college binge drinkers, so we need to act now.

Addressing underage alcohol use is a shared responsibility. Prevention must start in the home with parents playing a key role. However, all North Dakotans need to get involved in stemming this trend and participating in the state's multi-faceted effort to reduce alcohol use by our most vulnerable citizens.

Whether you are a parent, teacher, police officer, policy maker, community leader or friend, you need to do your part to educate our kids about the importance of abstinence. With April designated as Alcohol Awareness Month, now is the time for you to get involved and make a difference.

There are plenty of young men and women across our state that are excelling in their studies, or at a particular sport or talent, and serving their schools, communities and

churches with pride and respect. As a state, we need to recognize them and support them in their efforts. We must identify the environmental factors that incite alcohol abuse and replace them with messages of healthy lifestyle choices.

By helping our young people say yes to their lives, we're providing them with the best possible reason to say no to alcohol. And that is a responsibility we all share.